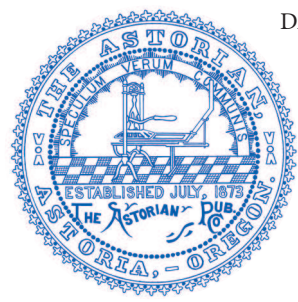


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Rentals issue puts democracy into action

Regulations surrounding short-term rentals continue to be a divisive issue on the North Coast.

This past week, the Gearhart City Council unanimously adopted an ordinance that contains new rules to regulate short-term rentals. The ordinance was several years in the making with public hearings that filled meeting rooms and divided the community. Even after the new ordinance was adopted, a portion of the Gearhart community remains divided and plans to push for an initiative that will supersede the new rules.

Farther south, in Cannon Beach, the City Council hopes to make its short-term rental regulations more “clear and understandable” and is working on new code amendments to streamline the process. Part of that proposed streamlining would make short-term rental permits more similar to business license applications instead of planning or zoning decisions, a move that would shift review of permit applications from the city’s Planning Commission to the City Council. It would also shift appeals from the Land Use Board of Appeals to Circuit Court.

The proposal has irked members of the Planning Commission who are now at odds with the council on the issue. At their August meeting, Planning Commissioner Robin Risley put it bluntly, saying, “I think the whole community should be more involved in that decision and you are eliminating one of the steps.”

Gearhart

In Gearhart, the new rules go into effect in 30 days, followed by a one-time 60-day period in which property owners may apply for short-term rental status. Applicants must pay a \$600 fee and show proof they have paid their taxes. No new permits will be issued after the 60-day period. The new rules include parking requirements and occupancy limits among other restrictions, and the permits may only be transferred by inheritance rather than being passed on with the sale of a home.

The clear intent of the new rules is to reduce the number of short-term rentals over time through attrition.

But those new rules have led a group of homeowners to announce their intention to seek an election initiative that would put an alternative proposal before voters and supersede the council’s ordinance. The initiative would allow the transfer of permits through home sales, would increase the number of permits allowed and calls for changes in the occupancy and parking limitations.

Although initiative backers say the city hasn’t listened to them, Mayor Dianne Widdop said after the meeting that “everyone has had the opportunity to be heard.”

According to City Attorney Peter Watts if the group does push for an initiative for the voters it is too late for November’s election, but it could be on the ballot next year.

Cannon Beach

In Cannon Beach, the council will continue to refine its proposed amendments with the hope of completing the task by the end of the year.

The council will likely hold a work session next month to discuss the potential changes and other proposals to the short-term rental permitting process. Working out the differences with the Planning Commission should be an obvious priority during upcoming work sessions on short-term rentals.

In both cities, the issue has put elected officials and residents in motion.

Speaking about a possible initiative after all the work Gearhart officials have put into the new rules, City Administrator Chad Sweet hit the nail directly on the head when he told Daily Astorian reporter R.J. Marx that, “For me, it’s all just part of the process. It’s democracy in action.”

He’s exactly right.

In Gearhart, the new rules are going into effect and the homeowners who oppose the ordinance aren’t shut out of the process, they still have the opportunity to seek the ballot initiative. If it gets that far, voters will have the final say next year.

In Cannon Beach, the short-term rental revisions are still in the early stages and should entail both the City Council and the Planning Commission working out the details together and not be on opposing sides before any new changes are put in place.

That too, is part of the democratic process.



GUEST COLUMN

Gearhart coalition responds to short-term rental initiative

By the FRIENDS OF GEARHART
 For The Daily Astorian

Open letter to short-term rental owners: On Wednesday evening, the Gearhart City Council unanimously passed an ordinance regulating vacation rental dwellings. This ordinance was a result of months of work by the Planning Commission, several public hearings that were so large they were held in the firehouse and months of work by the City Council with input from the city manager, city planner and city attorney. The ordinance as adopted is fair to both residents who do not rent their homes, and non-residents, who are the majority of short-term landlords.

Now the short-term landlords say they have drafted an initiative that they claim they are going to put on the ballot for a vote by Gearhart voters. They claim the initiative is a fair compromise. A fair comparison of the initiative to the ordinance adopted by the City Council says otherwise.

Lodging taxes

First, the ordinance adopted by the City Council makes it a condition of obtaining a permit to rent your home that you have paid your lodging taxes to the city for the previous year. The proposed short-term rental (STR) owner’s initiative does not make that a condition. We are not sure why that would be a problem for those proposing the initiative, because we are sure they all have paid their lodging taxes that are due.

Second, the ordinance adopted by the City Council limits occupancy to two people per bedroom. Children under 2 years old are exempt. Septic systems for a home are designed to accommodate two people per bedroom. The proposed STR owner’s initiative limits occupancy to two people per bedroom, plus two, with a maximum limit of 18 people, plus exempts people under 18 years old. Therefore, a three-bedroom home could accommodate eight adults and eight children. Not a good prospect for the septic system.

Third, the ordinance adopted by the City Council requires that there be one parking space within the property boundary line for each bedroom. This new STR-owner initiative has no parking requirements. The proposers of the initiative make the argument that those homeowners who do not rent can park as many cars as they want on their property. But how often do homeowners who do not rent have eight adults and eight children occupying their home seven days a week for three months during any given summer?

“In the old days we would say ‘See you in court,’ but today we say, ‘We will see you at the ballot box.’”

Friends of Gearhart

Fourth, the ordinance adopted by the City Council requires a septic tank inspection approved by the Clatsop County Health Department. The ordinance further does not allow a rental where there are cesspools. The proposed initiative requires no such inspection.

Making contact

Fifth, the ordinance by the City Council requires that the homeowner who is renting his home provide a name and telephone number and a response person. The ordinance further requires that the person be available to respond physically within 30 minutes, and in fact physically respond within 30 minutes if requested. The new STR owner-proposed initiative only requires that a phone number be provided. That phone number may be to a person in

Portland, Seattle or California.

Sixth, the initiative by the City Council does not allow a permit to be transferred if the property is sold. The proposed initiative does not have that restriction.

Seventh, the ordinance adopted by the City Council has general restrictions on the appearance of the property to be rented. The STR-owner initiative has no such restrictions.

Eighth, the ordinance adopted by the City Council requires a safety and fire inspection. The proposed initiative has no such requirement.

Ninth, the initiative adopted by the City Council has penalties for violations of the ordinance. If a homeowner who rents his home is in violation of the ordinance, his permit may be revoked. The proposed STR-owner initiative has no penalties for violation whatsoever. That may be because the ordinance has no restrictions that may be violated.

And then there is the poison pill that has been written into the initiative. The new STR-owner initiative provides that if it is adopted, it may be only amended in the future by the voters, not by the City Council.

There is one thing that we agree with those who are proposing the initiative: That the voters should have a say in this matter. Therefore, if short-term rental owners go forward with their initiative, we will be providing a counter initiative that will be placed before the same voters.

The counter initiative will be very simple. It will state as follows: “A rental of less than 30 days is a non-permitted use in R-1 and R-2 zoned neighborhoods. Any violation of this ordinance shall result in a penalty of \$500 per day.” In the old days we would say “See you in court,” but today we say, “We will see you at the ballot box.”

JEANNE MARK

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On behalf of the Friends of Gearhart

Time for a political realignment

By DAVID BROOKS

New York Times News Service

There’s a good chance many of you will be switching political parties over the next 15 years. You may be a corporate executive who’s voted rock-solid Republican for decades, but you may be a consistent Democrat by 2024.

You may be an African-American community activist in Cleveland, but don’t be surprised if you someday call the Republican Party home.

The fact is that political parties can swap constituencies in unexpected and dramatic ways. Over American history there’s been a general pattern: a period of party stability; then some new issue comes to the fore that divides the country in new ways; old party coalitions fall apart and new ones emerge.

African-Americans were once Republican, but the Great Depression brought economics to the fore and FDR lured them the other way. New England professionals were once Republican, too, but the rise of Barry Goldwater-Ronald Reagan Sun Belt conservatism turned them Democratic.

We seem to be at one of those transformational moments now.

Dying out

In the first place, many of the existing partisan mentalities are dying out. This is the last presidential election in which two baby boomers will be running against each other. In the years ahead, politics will no longer be defined by the hidden animosities of the Vietnam era, by the sexual revolution/culture war issues of the 1970s.

Future candidates will not be nostalgic for some white America of ancient memory or the union-heavy labor markets of the 1950s. They’re not going to be fired up by the “paradise lost” hot buttons that excite the old guys who watch Fox News.

Politics is catching up to social reality. The crucial social divide today is between those who feel the core trends of the global, information-age economy as tailwinds at their backs and those who feel them as headwinds in their face.

That is to say, the most important social divide today is between a well-educated America that is marked by economic openness, traditional family structures, high social capital and high trust in institutions, and a less-educated America that is marked by economic insecurity, anarchic family structures, fraying community bonds, and a pervasive sense of betrayal and distrust.

These two groups live in entirely different universes. Right now each

party has a foot in each universe, but those coalitions won’t last.

The dispossessed

The Republican Party is now a coalition of globalization-loving business executives and globalization-hating white workers. That’s untenable. At its molten core, the Republican Party has become the party of the dispossessed, not the party of cosmopolitan business.

Now imagine a Republican Party after Donald Trump, led by a younger candidate without his bigotry and culture war tropes. That party will begin to attract disaffected Sanders people who detest the Trans-Pacific Partnership and possibly some minority voters highly suspicious of the political elite.

The Democratic Party is a coalition of the upscale urban professionals who make up the ruling class and less-affluent members of minorities who feel betrayed by it. That’s untenable, too. At its molten core the Democratic Party is the party of the coastal professional class.

Polls suggest the Democrats will win among college-educated voters. Republicans will win among whites without a college degree. The social, mental and emotional gap between those two groups is getting wider and wider. That’s the future of American politics. Republicans are town. Democrats are gown. Could get ugly.